

Middle School Students' Perceptions of Caring Teacher Behaviors: Differences by Minority Status

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In U. S. schools, which have a primarily White teaching force but an increasingly non-White student population, students and teachers may not be able to complete caring encounters based on their differing communication patterns. Therefore, it is important to understand what behaviors students view as caring so that teachers can complete caring encounters with their students. This research investigated differences in 825 sixth-grade students' perceptions of teacher caring based on student minority status. The findings of this research demonstrate that care does look different to different groups of students. Therefore, teachers must care for their students in culturally congruent ways if all students are to receive the benefits of caring teacher-student relationships.

INTRODUCTION

While classrooms are often thought to be neutral sites where social and academic learning occurs, the social context of a classroom affects the learning that occurs in that classroom (Young & Smith, 1997). One social factor in a classroom is the relationship between teachers and students. If this relationship is a caring relationship, students academically and socially benefit (e.g., Birch & Ladd, 1997; Crosnoe, Johnson & Elder, 2004). However, it is possible that not all students view the same behaviors as evidence of teacher caring. It is important to understand what behaviors students view as caring, so that teachers are aware of how to help all students receive the benefits of a caring teacher-student relationship. In order for a student to receive these benefits, both the teacher and student must consider the relationship caring.

According to Noddings (2005), care is not an individual trait or virtue, but the state of a relationship. "A *caring relation* [sic] is, in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings—a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for" (p. 15, emphasis in the original). For Noddings, both parties must contribute to caring. If one party does not participate, there is still a relationship, but it is not a caring one. Because caring exists only in a relationship between two people, it is an aspect of communication. If care is intended but is not perceived on both the parts of the carer and cared-for, then a miscommunication has occurred, resulting in the absence of a caring encounter. In schools, although many teachers purport to care about their students (Goldstein & Lake, 2000), their care is functionally nonexistent unless it is perceived by their students as care.

All communication patterns, including expectations of how care is expressed, are rooted in culture (Delpit, 1995; Ward, 1995). Communication is rooted in language, whether spoken or nonverbal (Martin & Nakayama, 2000). Not only are languages used to communicate with others, but they are also primary devices that individuals use to organize reality (Delpit, 1992, 1995). Therefore, if two individuals speak two different languages, they may also perceive reality in two different ways. The two languages need not be from distinct linguistic families; for example, the differences between Standard English and Ebonics (Smitherman, 1998) are enough to lead to miscommunication (Erickson, 1987). As the U. S. student population becomes more diverse (Hoffman & Sable, 2006) and the U. S. teaching population continues to be dominated by White, middle-class females (Landsman & Lewis, 2006), teachers and students may have increasing miscommunications based on their differing communication patterns. This problem may lead to situations in which teachers attempt to form caring relationships with their students, but are unable

to do so because of misunderstandings based in communication patterns. In light of these demographics, the purpose of this research was to examine differences in student perceptions of teacher caring based on student minority status.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Perceptions of Teacher Caring

Students benefit, both academically and emotionally, when they perceive that their teachers care about them (e.g., Birch & Ladd, 1997; Murdock & Miller, 2003; Shann, 1999). While this body of literature on teacher caring exists, the research involved adult voices, whether it was that of the teachers themselves or of adult classroom observers. Few studies present the voices of the actual students, even though the students, as the receivers of teacher care, determine whether or not caring has occurred. Therefore, the author includes here only studies that approach the issue of teacher caring from students' perspectives, not other issues such as how those perceptions affected students or what school characteristics were likely to foster such perceptions and those studies that reported on elementary and middle school students' perspectives of teacher caring. As the relevant literature was reviewed, evidence that students valued three types of caring was found: (a) interpersonal skills, (b) support for academic performance, (c) and ensuring fairness.

Evidence of students' belief that interpersonal skills constitute teacher caring has been discussed by several researchers. Cutforth (1999) found that students felt teachers cared about them when they maintained a high level of control. Rogers (1994) revealed that students valued teachers who demonstrated their care through concern for students' academic, social, and physical well-being. Howard (2001) posited that one category of teachers who students felt cared about them were those who made students feel welcome in the classroom through behaviors such as pats on the back, directly stating that they care about students, and demonstrating a wide range of emotions. Wentzel (1997) discussed that students felt teachers cared about them when they communicated openly with students, treated students with respect, demonstrated concern for students beyond the academic realm, and praised students. Finally, Ruggiero (2005) found that students felt teachers cared about them when they gave positive feedback, helped students stay out of trouble, were aware of and sensitive to students' emotions, and provided safety for students. These studies demonstrated that many elementary and middle school students associated interpersonal skills with teacher caring.

Several researchers also provided evidence of students believing that improving academic performance constituted teacher caring. Howard (2001) found that some students felt that caring teachers were those who pushed their students to higher academic achievement by expressing high expectations or being strict about students doing their work. Wentzel (1997) discovered that students felt teachers cared about them when they taught in an interesting way or asked if students needed help with academic work. Similarly, Ruggiero (2005) revealed that students felt teachers cared about them when they had high expectations for all students, made learning fun, and assisted students with achievement and understanding. These studies demonstrated that many elementary and middle school students associate behaviors designed to increase academic performance with teacher caring.

The studies suggested that some students value teachers who are primarily concerned with students' academic performance and place less emphasis on interpersonal skills, while other students value the opposite. These studies were conducted in either monoculture settings or diverse settings, but no cross-cultural analysis was conducted. Overall, these studies provided evidence for two types of teacher caring: (a) concern with students' academic performance and (b) interpersonal skills.

A final source of information on students' perceptions of caring teachers was established in the historical research conducted on schools for African Americans operated prior to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision. These studies are particularly important because

they explicitly consider caring from a non-White perspective. One major critique of Noddings's ethic of care (2005) is that it is a monoculture, White model, and therefore, inappropriate for application to non-White students. Audrey Thompson (1998, 2003) is one of the foremost critics of Noddings's theory. Thompson (2003) expressed concern that "... what counts as responding to the needs of students, families, and communities is likely to vary from one culture or situation to another" (pp. 27-28). As Thompson might have predicted, Dempsey and Noblit (1993), Morris and Morris (2002), and Siddle Walker (1993) provided evidence that alumni of schools for African American learners prior to desegregation discussed a different type of caring than the students discussed in the current research.

While also providing evidence that these alumni considered interpersonal skills and behaviors designed to promote academic achievement as proof of teacher caring, the studies uncovered another type of caring: ensuring fairness. Dempsey and Noblit (1993) found that students valued that teachers had an academic, emotional, and psychological concern for them. Morris and Morris (2002) revealed that alumni remembered caring teachers as being those who behaved fairly toward all students. Siddle Walker (1993) discussed that students remembered teachers offering outside resources to those who needed them in order to ensure success for all students. Taken together, these studies suggested that alumni of schools for African American learners prior to desegregation associated behaviors designed to ensure fairness, as well as interpersonal skills and support for academic skills with teacher caring.

Consideration of this third type of caring demands that researchers not develop alternate theories about caring for individual situations (Delpit, 1992), as if the lives of non-Whites are mere variations on a theme (Zinn & Dill, 2006), but as Thompson (1998) herself suggested, "to inform and reorient [theories of care] in ways that systematically account for race, class, gender, cultural, and other differences" (p. 528). Therefore, instead of finding "exceptions to the norm," that is, places where caring looks different when undertaken among non-White people, it is important to start to build an increasingly complex theory of what caring can look like. This author has therefore chosen to investigate teacher caring through the lens of Fordham and Ogbu's theory of minority status (1986).

Defining Minority Status

According to Fordham and Ogbu (1986), there are three types of minorities in the U. S. The first type is autonomous minorities who are in the minority in number only (Blauner, as cited in Jeffries & Ransford, 1980). Little attention has been paid to autonomous minorities since they function as members of the majority culture today, although they may have faced extreme discrimination on their initial entry into American society. White ethnic immigrants such as the Irish, Italian, and Polish comprise this group who are ethnically, although not racially, different from the dominant group in society.

The second type, immigrant or voluntary minorities, are those groups who immigrated to the U. S. willingly with the expectation of improved economic, social, or political status (Blauner, as cited in Jeffries & Ransford, 1980). In the later part of the twentieth century and extending into the present, individuals from countries such as Japan, Korea, China, Cuba, the Philippines, and the West Indies may experience some level of subordination or exploitation, but still find the social structure of the U. S. to be more positive than the social structure of their home countries (Conchas, 2006). Immigrants from the Middle East fit into this category as well; while they experience greater levels of discrimination than the other groups listed in this, they are voluntary immigrants (Torres, 2006).

The third group, called variously subordinate, caste-like, or involuntary minorities, are those who immigrated to the U. S. against their will, were enslaved or otherwise economically exploited, or were subjected to the systematic destruction of their culture (Blauner, as cited in Jeffries & Ransford, 1980). These are peoples who continue to face economic and social

subordination (Conchas, 2006). Individuals descended from the continent of Africa, persons who identify as Chicano or Mexican, persons who identify as Native American, and those groups from the island of Puerto Rico may be identified as involuntary minorities. There is some disagreement about whether or not the monolithic group "Hispanic" functions as an involuntary minority group (Niemann, Romero, Arrendondo, & Rodriguez, 1999; Noguera, 2006; Ramos-Zayas, 2007). However, given the tendency for people to be grouped and treated differently by others based on their perceived race, it is fair to say that while there may be regional or other individual exceptions to these categories, they hold true for people perceived to be Hispanic living in the U. S.

The experience of immigrants has been dramatically different in the U. S. based membership in one of the three minority status groups. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, White ethnic immigrants faced discrimination when they moved into cities and worked industrial occupations. However, such discrimination is atypical for White ethnic immigrants. Involuntary minorities experience continued discrimination because visible physical differences result in limited social mobility (Jeffries & Ransford, 1980). The limited social mobility experienced by involuntary minorities was compounded by their low social and economic positions (Wilson, 2006). The social and economic mobility experienced by involuntary minorities must be viewed through the lens of history, since these events have direct implications in the daily lives of members of involuntary minority groups.

To date, only one study has explored the role of race in filtering students' perceptions of caring teachers. Hayes, Ryan, and Zseller (1994) used a qualitative survey to elicit descriptions of past caring teachers from 208 sixth-grade students in three schools, one of which served a predominantly White student population, while the other two served predominantly African American student populations. The researchers found that these students generally felt teachers cared about them when they responded to students as individuals, encouraged students to achieve success, acted in a fun manner, gave advice about in- and out-of-school problems, avoided anger and yelling, listened to students, and effectively managed misbehavior. Furthermore, the researchers found that students felt teachers cared about them when they helped with academic tasks and shared accurate content area knowledge. Therefore, Hayes and colleagues (1994) found two of the same categories of caring (academic behaviors and interpersonal behaviors) that this author located in the review of research presented.

After finding commonalities among students, Hayes, Ryan, and Zseller (1994) examined their data categorically and found differences by the race of the student. White students were more likely to value teachers who acted in a fun manner and shared accurate content area knowledge. African American students were more likely to value teachers who helped with academic tasks and encouraged students to achieve. While White students desired teacher caring in both academic achievement and interpersonal skills, African American students were more likely to desire teacher caring that helped with academic achievement. This finding demonstrates that race did act as a filter for teacher caring and students' perceptions of caring teacher behaviors varied based on their race. Hayes and colleagues researched only African American and White students, but it is a logical extension to argue that students who identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Hispanic, or Latino, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or those who identified with multiple racial categories might also have different perceptions of what constitutes teacher caring.

METHODOLOGY

The author sought to examine differences in students' perceptions of caring teacher behaviors by minority status. To address this topic, it was necessary to look at a large group of students who could be classified into subgroups based on their minority status. First, students' perceptions of caring teacher behaviors were surveyed. Then commonalities and differences on specific measures of caring teacher behaviors were examined based on subgroup membership. In this research, student minority status was the independent variable. Students' perceptions of caring teacher behaviors comprised the dependent variable. The differences and similarities in the dependent

variable based on the independent variable were examined. The type of research that is best suited to address this research situation is *ex post facto* research using an intact group comparative design (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

The students were surveyed in a single county in a mid-western state. An overwhelming number of the students in the county's schools were identified in school records as White. Therefore, in order to obtain a diverse group of participants, the present investigator chose to include individual schools based on a series of characteristics. First, demographic information was obtained for all schools serving sixth-grade students from the educational service agency, followed by the selection of individual schools that contained three race-based subpopulations comprising at least 5% of the overall school enrollment. This author then excluded the schools that were day treatment facilities or otherwise served on special education populations to eliminate a possible confounding variable. This process generated a list of 23 schools that were located in 10 districts, of which when contacted to take part in this research, 6 gave permission for their schools to participate. These 6 districts contained 14 out of the 23 schools and of these 14 schools, 7 chose to take part (30.4% of the study population).

While 1,339 students were eligible participants in this research, 825 did so (61.6%). The study sample consisted of 54.5% females and 41.9% males, with 3.5% of the students not identifying their sex. Most of the students were born in the U. S. with 7.6% born in another country. A percentage of the students (26.9%) had one or more parents born in another country. Participant race and ethnicity is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Racial and Ethnic Demographics of Participants

Racial/Ethnic Group	Percent of Participants (%)
White or Caucasian	71.3
Black or African American	13.5
Asian	12.0
Multiracial (indicated two or more categories)	11.3
Middle Eastern	8.7
Hispanic or Latino	6.3
American Indian or Alaskan Native	6.3
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.6

Note. Participants were allowed to select more than one category; therefore, percentages exceed 100%.

A written survey formed by the author from personal experience as an elementary- and middle-school teacher, a review of relevant research, conversations with professors of education, and a sourcebook for survey items (Dahlberg, Toal, Swahn, & Behrens, 2005), was administered to all students who had given their assent and whose parents had given their consent. The instrument is based on one used in earlier research (Tosolt, 2009) and refined through a multi-stage process (Tosolt, in press). The author designed the survey to assess a broad range of possible caring behaviors into three major categories: (a) Interpersonal Caring, (b) Academic Caring, and (c) Fairness Caring. Interpersonal Caring was defined as those behaviors that might be expected or accepted among friends or family members, such as giving compliments, hugging, and warmly greeting someone. Academic Caring behaviors were defined as those behaviors that encourage students to continue to work at academic tasks, such as writing helpful comments on a student's paper, and encouraging a student to continue to improve his or her skill level. Fairness Caring was

defined as those behaviors that contribute to fair treatment for all students regardless of their membership in any particular subgroup such as ensuring that all students understand a given point before moving on to another lesson and encouraging students to help one another to master concepts. The three categories of caring considered in this study are based on the review of the literature.

While the first portion of the instrument collected demographic information from the students, the largest portion of the survey was a list of 50 possible teacher behaviors. The survey allowed students to consider each behavior and to decide if it is evidence of a caring teacher. Students assessed the behaviors on a four-point modified Likert-type scale. It is important to note that the students were directed that the survey was not about a particular teacher. Instead, the students were to imagine a teacher doing these behaviors and judge the teacher's actions. Therefore, this survey did not measure differences in students' perceptions of, for example, African American teachers or White teachers.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) theorized that members of minority groups in the U. S. fall into one of three categories: (a) autonomous minorities, (b) immigrant or voluntary minorities, and (c) subordinate, caste-like, or involuntary minorities. In keeping with Fordham and Ogbu's classification system, the author combined groups of students to form the same three categories. To form the autonomous minority category, those students who identified as White or Caucasian, from a specific European country, and Jewish were combined into one group. For the immigrant or voluntary minorities category, those students who identified as Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Chinese, from the Indian subcontinent, and Middle Eastern were combined into the second group. For simplicity, the author refers to this category as "voluntary minorities." The third category for subordinate, caste-like, or involuntary minorities was for those who identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native, Black or African American, or Hispanic. The author also included all students who identified as multiracial but only for those students who identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native and Black or African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native and Hispanic, and Black or African American and Hispanic. For simplicity this group was identified as "involuntary minorities." These three groupings of students were used as the categories of the independent variable in the analyses.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were run to determine whether the students in these categories responded similarly across items. The results of these ANOVA demonstrated that for the students in this sample, the groups "autonomous minorities," "voluntary minorities," and "involuntary minorities" responded to these items. Therefore, they were used as the three levels of the independent variable (student minority status) in the rest of the analyses. In order to compare the six measures of caring teacher behaviors by student minority status, a standard alpha level of 0.05 was used to determine significance.

FINDINGS

There were four items of which students who identified with an autonomous minority group or a voluntary minority group responded differently than students who identified with an involuntary minority group at the alpha level of 0.05. Those four items were (a) "tells jokes," (b) "lets me choose whether to work alone or in a group," (c) "grades and returns my papers without taking too long," and (d) "spells and says my name correctly." Of these four behaviors, two belong to the Academic Caring category while one each belongs to Interpersonal Caring and Fairness Caring categories. In all four cases, students who identified with an autonomous minority group or a voluntary minority group were more likely to believe that the given behavior was evidence of a caring teacher than were students who identified with an involuntary minority group.

There were three items of which students who identified with an autonomous minority group responded differently than students who identified with a voluntary minority group, while students who identified with an involuntary minority group were not statistically different in their answers at the alpha level of 0.05. Those three items were (a) "greet me when I enter the classroom," (b)

"gives me compliments out loud in front of the class," and (c) "makes me behave so the other kids can learn." Of these three behaviors, one each belongs to the Academic Caring, Interpersonal Caring, and Fairness Caring categories. In all three cases, students who identified with an autonomous minority group were more likely to believe that the given behavior was evidence of a caring teacher than were students who identified with a voluntary minority group.

There was one item of which students who identified with an autonomous minority group responded differently than students who identified with either a voluntary minority group or an involuntary minority group at the alpha level of 0.05. This item was "holds classroom discussions where lots of students get to talk." This behavior belongs to the Academic Caring category. Students who identified with an autonomous minority group were more likely to believe that holding classroom discussions where lots of students get to talk was evidence of a caring teacher than were students who identified with a voluntary minority group or an involuntary minority group.

There were nine items of which students who identified with an autonomous minority group responded differently than students who identified with an involuntary minority group, while students who identified with a voluntary minority group were not statistically different in their choices from either of the previous groups of students at the alpha level of 0.05. Those nine items were (a) "admits that he or she is wrong sometimes," (b) "helps me when other kids are picking on me," (c) "helps me with a problem not related to school," (d) "smiles at me," (e) "protects me," (f) "writes helpful comments on my papers," (g) lets me ask lots of questions, (h) "listens to my side of the story," and (i) "gets involved when other students are being mean to each other." Of these behaviors, five belong to the Interpersonal Caring category, while two each belong to the Academic Caring and Fairness Caring categories. In all nine cases, students who identified with an autonomous minority group were more likely to believe that the given behavior was evidence of a caring teacher than were students who identified with an involuntary minority group.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine differences based on minority status in 825 sixth-grade students' responses about which behaviors are evidence of a caring teacher. The results of this study indicate that there are differences in how students perceive certain behaviors based on student membership in one of the three categories of minorities. The fact that there are differences in how students perceive teacher caring lends support to the hypothesis that these three groups of minorities (autonomous, voluntary, and involuntary) function differently in society. Furthermore, these differences confirm that, at least for the students in this population, caring looks different among students of different minority groups, as theorized by Collison, Killeavy, and Stephenson (1999); Delpit (1992); and Thompson (1998, 2003).

The first major difference found in this research was that students who identify with an autonomous minority group and students who identify with an involuntary minority group often differ in their perceptions of various teacher behaviors as caring. Out of the 17 behaviors of which there were significant differences by student membership in the three categories of minorities, autonomous minorities and involuntary minorities responded differently than one another 14 times. The frequency of this difference lends support to the research of Hayes and colleagues (1994), who found that African American students and White students were likely to view different types of behaviors as evidence of a caring teacher. In addition, this difference lends support to authors such as Delpit (1992); Erickson (1987); and Ward (1995), who maintain that differences in communication patterns parallel differences in perceptions of reality.

The second major difference found in this research concerned the perceptions of those students who identified as voluntary minorities. In some cases, students who identified with a voluntary minority group had significant differences in their level of agreement about what behaviors constitute evidence of teacher caring from either student who identified with an

autonomous minority group or students who identified with an involuntary minority group. In other cases, students who identified with a voluntary minority group had similar responses about what behaviors constitute evidence of teacher caring to students who identified with an autonomous minority group. Finally, in some cases, students who identified with a voluntary minority group had similar beliefs about what behavior is evidence of teacher caring to students who identified with an involuntary minority group. In this research, students who identified with a voluntary minority group functioned 'in between' students who identified with an autonomous minority group and students who identified with an involuntary minority group. This 'in between' functioning lends further support to Fordham and Ogbu (1986) who maintained that voluntary minorities occupy a position in society closer to that of autonomous minorities than involuntary minorities.

The third major finding in this research relates to the perceptions of students who identified with autonomous minority groups. In all but one of the 17 cases where there was a significant difference based on student minority status, students who identified with an autonomous minority group reported the highest level of agreement that the given behavior was evidence of a caring teacher. On average, students who identified with an autonomous minority group indicated that these behaviors were stronger evidence of a caring teacher than did students who identified with a voluntary or an involuntary minority group.

There are several explanations for this finding. First, it is possible that students who identified with an autonomous minority group have more experience with caring teachers. If students have more experience with caring teacher behaviors, they may be more able to identify which behaviors are evidence of teacher caring. Second, it is possible that students who identified with an autonomous minority group have broader standards for behaviors that are evidence of a caring teacher. Finally, it is possible that the behaviors that were listed on the survey were more likely to be experienced by students who identified with an autonomous minority group than by students who identified with a voluntary minority group or an involuntary minority group. Students who identified with a voluntary minority group or an involuntary minority group may be more likely to experience other caring behaviors that were not on this survey.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this research. First, because the research was conducted within a single county, the findings of this research cannot be generalized beyond similar populations. A further limitation of the setting is that each of the participating schools is attended primarily by White students. While each of the schools contained at least three race-based subpopulations comprising 5% of the overall school enrollment, the largest race-based subpopulation in each of the schools was White students. This issue is a limitation because it could indicate that the culture of the school is more similar to the home culture of students who identified with an autonomous minority group. This observation may help explain the finding that students who identified with an autonomous minority group were more likely to rate behaviors as evidence of a caring teacher than were students who identified with either a voluntary minority group or an involuntary minority group.

There are possible limitations to the instrument itself. While the instrument has been used in earlier research studies with positive results (Tosolt, in press), and the instrument was pilot-tested extensively, it is possible that the behaviors offered as choices did not capture the full spectrum of possible caring teacher behaviors. The instrument was created by a White, middle-class female, and while many non-White, non-middle-class, non-female persons were consulted in the creation and refinement of the instrument, is it possible that the author's viewpoint influenced the final product.

A final set of limitations concerns racial identity. While students were given the option to indicate multiracial identity, not enough did so to allow for meaningful analysis of multiracial students as a subgroup. If this research had been conducted in places other than the single county,

more students would have indicated multiracial identity, and the possibility may have allowed further analysis. In addition, a number of students asked what they should put down in response to the questions asked. It was important that the students self-define; therefore, this author did not want to make judgments about race or ethnicity based on appearances. In addition, students of Middle Eastern ancestry also appeared to have difficulty answering questions on race and ethnicity.

Finally, the analyses conducted were based on Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) three categories of minorities. Their work, and in turn, the author's work, rests on the premise that people within each of these three categories will behave similarly to one another. Broad categories mask within-group differences (Conchas, 2006). While race and ethnicity were of primary interest in this research, their use was not without issues. Also, the age of Fordham and Ogbu's framework may be suspect. While the three groups of students in this research responded as Fordham and Ogbu might have predicted, as U. S. society becomes less racially segregated and multiracial identity becomes more prominent, the model may need revision.

Directions for Future Research

There are several tasks for future researchers. First, this study needs to be replicated in broader settings. The county in which this research was conducted was a suburban county; therefore, this research needs to be replicated in urban, suburban, and rural counties. In addition, the schools that took part in this research were still populated primarily by White students. This research needs to be replicated in schools where White students are not in the majority to see if different behaviors emerge as important or if further differences are found.

Second, this research needs to be followed up with interviews of students. While the instrument's pilot-testing included focus groups, they were focused on the content of the instrument, not the findings. A researcher needs discuss the findings with groups of students and ask them their opinions about the findings. It would be interesting if the researcher were to follow-up with two types of groupings of students: those students based on minority status and those students across minority status. Meeting with both groupings would further shed light on the similarities and differences of students' perceptions of caring teacher behaviors.

Third, this instrument needs refined by people with diverse points of view. While attempts were made to bring many points of view into the creation and refinement process, the instrument was created primarily by a White, middle-class female. In the future, as others give their input on the instrument, new behaviors may be added, wording may be changed, or other changes may be made that will address some of the limitations discussed because of racial and ethnic identification.

CONCLUSION

This research investigated differences in students' perceptions of caring teacher behaviors based on student minority status and demonstrated that there are differences in how students perceive given behaviors. Findings should not be interpreted that teachers should treat all students who identify with a given group one way and all students who identify with a different group another way; instead, they demonstrate the importance of acknowledging students' home cultures in schools. These findings show that students who experience different home cultures perceive what is happening in classrooms in fundamentally different ways. The implication is the same for both teachers and administrators: It is important to view each student as an individual and to acknowledge differences, where they exist, between how you see the world and how a particular student sees the world.

Finally, this research yields an overall finding about teacher caring. While teachers may intend to form caring relationships with their students, good intentions are not enough. This

research demonstrates that students have different perceptions about what behaviors constitute teacher caring. Therefore, while a teacher may wish to form a caring relationship with her or his students and may try to demonstrate her or his care in ways that seem caring to the teacher, the students may not view those behaviors as caring. Teachers must engage in conversations with their students about what care looks like and then must be willing to demonstrate their care in culturally congruent ways. Without attention to home culture and individual student differences, caring relationships cannot be established.

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